

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claim 1. (Previously Amended) A method for navigating the Internet and for facilitating user socialization at web sites, the method being utilized in a computer networking system having one or more central processing units, one or more memories, and one or more network connections, the method comprising steps of:

creating at least one instance of a mapping data structure for a web site, the data structure representing two or more categories, each of the categories divided into subcategories of ordered levels of specificity, each of the ordered levels of specificity being a grouping of subcategories of the same levels of specificity,

wherein said data structure overlays information about people, activities, and social interactions at the web site onto an internal representation of a semantic structure of contents of the web site;

populating said at least one mapping data structure by processing requests addressed to said web site; and

computing an abstract geometric representation of said mapping data structure for facilitating user socialization.

Claim 2. (Previously Amended) A method as in claim 1, wherein said data structure includes one or more sections, the sections being logical intersections of one of the categories with one of the levels of specificity.

Claim 3. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 2, wherein one or more subcategories have a degree of closeness relating the section to one or more other sections.

Claim 4. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 3, wherein the degree of closeness relates to any one or more of following: a physical closeness of location of physical items represented by the respective sections, a relational closeness between one or more users and one or more objects, a relational closeness between one or more users, a semantic closeness of descriptions of items represented by the respective sections, and a behavioral closeness of pattern of use.

Claim 5. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 1, wherein the categories include any one or more of the following: a product category, a service category, a category class, a category list, a product class, a list of products in a class, a product specification, a service class, a list of services, and a service specification.

Claim 6. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 1, wherein the levels of specificity include any one or more of the following: category class, category list, offering specification, product class, list of products in a class, product specification, service class, list of services, and a service specification.

Claim 7. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 1, further comprising a step of collecting information about one or more nodes located on one or more districts.

Claim 8. (Previously Amended) A system, as in claim 7, wherein the nodes are differentiated by any one or more node functions.

Claim 9. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 8, wherein the node functions include any one or more of the following: initiating a chat session, providing information, causing a user to be associated with a node location, providing access to sales information, providing access to a salesman, and changing a browser page to one that has information relating to the node.

Claim 10. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 7, wherein one or more of the nodes is a landmark that marks a salient location on one or more of the districts.

Claim 11. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 10, wherein the salient location is fixed and associated with one of a plurality of business categories.

Claim 12. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 10, wherein the salient location can change in time and is associated with an activity.

Claim 13. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 12, wherein the activity is any one or more of the following: a current "hot spot", "a list of most popular pages in a computer section", a public chat, a sale, a special product offering, a special service offering, and a sales agent availability.

Claim 14. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 10, wherein the salient location is personally meaningful to a user.

Claim 15. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 14, wherein the salient location represents any one or more of the following: a user's buddy, a chat buddy, a private chat, a user's favorite spot, and a user with common interest.

Claim 16. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 7, further comprising a step of generating one or more paths, each path connecting two or more nodes.

Claim 17. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 16, wherein the path links two or more of the nodes to associate connectivity relationships among the nodes.

Claim 18. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 16, wherein a path is associated with one of the following: a user's path through one or more of the districts, a customer's path

through one or more of the districts, a preferred path of a group of users through one or more of the districts, a preferred path of a group of users with common interests through one or more of the districts, and a preferred path of a group of users with complementary interests through one or more of the districts.

Claim 19. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 7, further comprising a step of grouping said one or more nodes into one or more node sets, each node set containing one or more nodes clustered in nearby locations in one or more of the districts.

Claim 20. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 19, wherein a node set represents a relationship among two or more nodes located in one or more of the districts.

Claim 21. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 19, wherein one or more of the node sets is associated with one of the following: a density of users gathered in one or more adjacent node locations, a set of node locations marking results of a search, a set of node locations related by a semantic attribute, a set of node locations visited by a group of users with common interests, a set of node locations visited by a group of users with complementary interests, and a crowd of users.

Claim 22. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 19, wherein one or more of the node sets has a node set function.

Claim 23. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 22, wherein the node set function includes any one or more of the following: providing information about the set, changing a user's location to be associated with a node location in the set, and changing a browser page to one that has information relating to a node in the set.

Claim 24. (Previously Amended) A method, as in claim 1, where the instance of the mapping data structure is served over one or more of the network connections for display of one

or more visual districts on one or more clients.

Claim 25. (Currently Amended) A computer executed method comprising the steps of:
~~collecting data representing a social category at a web site;~~
creating an instance of a mapping data structure for a given web site, the data structure representing two or more categories by dividing each of the categories into subcategories of ordered levels of specificity;
dividing each of the ordered levels of specificity into a grouping of subcategories of the same levels of specificity;
and displaying the subcategories and the grouping of subcategories in a visual, geometric pattern, wherein said data overlays information about people, activities, and social interactions at the web site onto an internal representation of a semantic structure of contents of the web site.

Claim 26. (Currently Amended) A computer storage medium product for storing a computer program comprising the steps of:
~~collecting data representing a social category at a web site;~~
creating an instance of a mapping data structure for a given web site, the data structure representing two or more categories by dividing each of the categories into subcategories of ordered levels of specificity;
dividing each of the ordered levels of specificity into a grouping of subcategories of the same levels of specificity;
and displaying the subcategories and the grouping of subcategories in a visual, geometric pattern, wherein said data overlays information about people, activities, and social interactions at the web site onto an internal representation of a semantic structure of contents of the web site.

Claim 27. (Currently Amended) A computer system comprising:
~~means for collecting data representing a social category at a web site;~~
means for creating an instance of a mapping data structure for a given web site, the data structure representing two or more categories by dividing each of the categories into

subcategories of ordered levels of specificity;

means for dividing each of the ordered levels of specificity into a grouping of subcategories of the same levels of specificity; and

means for displaying the subcategories and the grouping of subcategories in a visual, geometric pattern, wherein said data overlays information about people, activities, and social interactions at the web site onto an internal representation of a semantic structure of contents of the web site.